



Sidebar C: **Orange and Green: Levels or Cousins?**

At one point, Mark Jefferson gave a quick sidebar on the relation of orange and green. From Kim's notes:

“Many of you know about an important disagreement that Jenny Wade has with Spiral Dynamics, namely, whether orange and green are *two different stages of development* or whether they are *two different paths through the same stage* of development (see her book, *Changes of Mind*). Both Don Beck and Jenny Wade are members of IC, so it's an in-house friendly disagreement. Also, this discussion is a little bit technical, and demands a general grasp of what we call a phase-4 model—‘all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states’—but I'll go through it briefly for those who are interested.

“Jenny points out that one of the first things that happens when people study Spiral Dynamics is that many of them say, ‘This model sounds very good, except I don't think I ever went through green. I don't have a green bone in my body!’ And it's true—many people who are clearly second tier just don't seem to possess much green—not as SD defines it, that is. This fact, among other things—Jenny is a consummate researcher, and her suggestion is also based on her interpretation of a considerable amount of research—got Jenny thinking that maybe green isn't a strict stage after orange and before yellow; rather, maybe green is simply one of two ways that a person can develop from blue to yellow, with the other way being orange, so that we would actually have this scheme: a person at blue (conformist) can develop forward in one of two basic ways: if they are more individualistically oriented, they develop from blue to orange, which Jenny calls the

achievement stage, and then go to yellow from orange; but if they are more communally oriented, they develop from blue to green, which Jenny calls affiliative, and then from there to yellow.

“Of course, no wave theorist—and certainly not Jenny or Don—views this development as being a rigid ladder-type thing, with a person simply being AT one stage, then a linear clunk to the next totally discrete stage, then a shuddering clunk again... although it is very entertaining to read some critics’ mirthful account of this nasty ‘linear’ development. No, all sophisticated developmentalists recognize that nobody is ever simply AT a stage; there are admixtures, meshes, swirls—and of course, there are actually waves and streams and altered states, with all sorts of nonlinear events happening. But the important point here, if we may nonetheless summarize in a clunky fashion, is that at blue there is a fork in the road: the more individualistic folks travel from blue to orange to yellow, and the more communalistic travel from blue to green to yellow. So, for Jenny, there are THREE stages or levels here, as opposed to Spiral Dynamics, which has FOUR stage/levels from blue to yellow (with orange and green being two real levels).

“Now, I am going to suggest that both Jenny and SD are half right and half wrong on this issue. Jenny is right, I believe, in that there are indeed equivalent paths of agency and communion involved at various stages; but I believe she is wrong to collapse orange and green into one stage (so that there are only three stages from blue to yellow). I believe SD is right in that there are indeed four major stages from blue to yellow, but incorrect when it describes green as necessarily or essentially communal. The model that I will present thus honors Jenny’s basic insight (namely, you can indeed get from blue to yellow without going through a communal-green stage), but it also honors the SD claim that there are four major stages from blue to yellow. I hope, therefore, that this model will preserve the best of both approaches.

“To begin with, let us look at the number of major stages from blue (conformist) to yellow (integral). Jenny suggests three stages, SD suggests four. Of course, how we divide and subdivide stages is often a matter of simple convenience, and there are many, many

legitimate ways to divide levels; but within the parameters of the debate at hand, I believe SD is correct: there are four major levels of development from blue to yellow. I will call these major levels: *concrete* (blue), *formal* (orange), *pluralistic* (green), and *integral* (yellow). Now I am NOT claiming that these levels have the exact characteristics that SD claims (for that is one of the issues on which I will side with Jenny); am I simply saying that SD is correct when it claims four major stages here (and that Jenny has unnecessarily collapsed two of these stages into one stage in her otherwise *correct* attempt to redress some problematic definitions of the orange and green stages made by SD—see below). The other stages (beige, purple, red, etc.) are basically uncontested by both parties (except that Jenny, rightly I believe, includes some higher or transpersonal stages, but that is not the issue here, so we will not discuss that).

“As for these four stages, the majority of developmental researchers tend to agree. If you look at the charts presented in *Integral Psychology*, you will find at least a dozen theorists who present evidence for four, not three, stages, going from concrete (conop) to formal (formop) to pluralistic (relativistic) to integral (holistic). The author of that book even comments on the general agreement about these four stages: ‘There is a general agreement that... growing beyond abstract universal *formalism* (of formop), consciousness moves first into a cognition of (postformal) dynamic relativity and *pluralism* (early vision-logic), and then into a cognition of holism, dynamic dialecticism, or *integralism* (middle to late vision-logic), all of which can be seen quite clearly on the charts...’ (p. 26-7). Thus: concrete, formal, pluralistic, and integral.

“Now, in the model that is presented in *Integral Psychology*, the cognitive structures—as the closest thing we have to levels of consciousness (see **Sidebar B**)—form a type of backbone, skeleton, or (to lapse into that crude metaphor,) a ladder which forms the substrate that the self-system then identifies with (think of them as the 7 chakras through which the self will journey in a fluid and flowing manner; the self does so by successively identifying and then dis-identifying its center of gravity with a particular chakra/level of consciousness). That *identification* of the self with a basic level/wave of consciousness,

among other items, generates various types of self-related stages, such as self-identity, morals, needs, and values (which are simply the characteristics of the self when it is at a particular level/chakra). Clare Graves and Spiral Dynamics technically are reporting the levels of values (value-Memes or vMemes). But I am first referring to the deeper or basic structure/levels of cognition-consciousness that *support* those values (research continues to show that cognitive development is necessary but not sufficient for the self-stages), and there is little question in my mind that those cognitive structures move from something like conop (concrete) to formop (systemic) to pluralistic (meta-systemic) to integral (paradigmatic, integrative)... to yet higher waves. As the self *identifies with* those basic levels of consciousness, the results of this shifting identification are the levels of self-needs, self-morals, self-values... and that is where SD and Wades' models especially enter the picture (and specifically, is it best to think of three or four levels here?). Not only do the cognitive researchers tend to agree with those four general levels (e.g., Commons and Richards, Jan Sinnott, Patricia Arlin), so do many of the researchers of the self-related lines (Jane Loevinger, Susanne Cook-Greuter, Blanchard-Fields, Kitchener and King, Deirdre Kramer, Cheryl Armon, etc. You can see all of these on the charts in *Integral Psychology*).

“Again, these types of questions are always somewhat relative and conventional. But in this case I believe it is very important to recognize four levels here—at least cognitively, and, I believe, in the self-related stages as well. Let me remind you about some of the important characteristic of these four basic levels or basic waves of consciousness (in these examples I will mix cognitive stages and self-stages, as long as we understand they are technically distinct).

“The concrete level (conop, conformist, mythic-membership) is noted for its unreflexive, concrete-literal nature—and hence is generally ethnocentric. This is a big step up from preoperational consciousness (egocentric), but it still cannot reflect on its own operations and thus it is caught in ‘my country, right or wrong’ and a ‘good boy, nice girl’ mentality.

“With the emergence of formal operational consciousness (formop, reflexive, abstract-universal), a person can begin to ‘norm the norms,’ to reflect on society’s rules and roles and thus rise above them to some extent—which moves consciousness from ethnocentric to worldcentric, from conventional to postconventional. This is the great and grand advance that the western Enlightenment brought on a large scale, even if it did not always live up to that bright promise.

“But the formal stage is certainly not the highest stage of consciousness. Beyond it lie *postformal* developments, the first of which is the *pluralistic-relativistic* wave. Where formop can grasp the nature of a truly *universal system*, that system tends to be conceived in a static and monovalent fashion, and also as something of straightjacket into which all local color is dissolved. The abstract-static nature of formalism has often been commented on—rather negatively, which is certainly understandable.

“This is where *postformal* developments are so important. For the pluralistic stage takes formalism and *differentiates* it into numerous, multiple systems, each with its own wonderful richness, color, local context, and diverse backgrounds. This is, of course, the major wave behind multiculturalism, the diversity movements, and postmodernism in general. It is responsible for being able to take multiple perspectives and appreciate all of them with sensitivity and care.

“However, as so many researchers have pointed out, if the pluralistic wave succeeds in *differentiating* the many cultural systems into numerous meta-systems, it cannot yet *integrate* them. This is why postmodernism tends to end up in mere fragmentation, alienation, and despair. Only with the next wave of consciousness development—that of the integral or holistic wave—are the numerous differentiated systems brought together into an integrated tapestry that, while honoring their important differences, sets them in an integrated context that finds unity and wholeness as well.

“Okay, from concrete to formal to pluralistic to integral—that development is a main topic of this seminar, and you have already seen many examples of it. The *self* (or the

sense of self-identity) that moves through those four major levels naturally has four major stages here, each of which is generated when the self *identifies* with one of those four levels of consciousness; these self-stages are called, respectively (to use the important research of Jane Loevinger): conformist (concrete), conscientious (formal), individualistic (pluralistic), and autonomous/integrated (integral). You can see all of these in fig. 4-1. And notice, Loevinger has four levels here. The conscientious and individualistic are not two different paths through the same level, but are two very different levels—giving four altogether.

“So those are the four main basic structures, or basic stages, or basic levels moving from blue to yellow: namely, concrete, formal, pluralistic, and integral (by whatever names). So this is the part where I believe SD is correct.

“But let us now focus on the claim of Spiral Dynamics that the stages of development alternate from individualistic to communal (or from self-asserting to self-sacrificing). As many of you know, according to SD, the successive stages *alternate* from a ‘hot’ or agentic stage—which accordingly is given a ‘hot’ color (red, orange, yellow)—to a cool or communal stage (with cool or soft colors: purple, blue, green, turquoise). According to SD, a major reason for this alternation is that one stage tries an individualistic approach to the world, eventually finds that there are things that only collectives can do, and so it develops to a collective or communal stage—only to find out that there are things only individuals can do. And thus the Spiral of development swings from an agentic stage, to a communal stage, to an agentic stage, to a communal stage, and so on. Of course, for SD, these stages or memes are adaptive intelligences brought forth by Life Conditions; nobody is ever AT a stage but rather displays a complex admixture of memes in various circumstances; and individuals can move through the Spiral with a constant emphasis on the hot or the cool colors; but still, the structure of each successive meme alternates from hot to cool, from agentic to communal.

“Now I believe that such is *often* the case, but it is not *necessarily* or inherently the case. I believe the evidence strongly suggests that *any* stage can take on an agentic or a communal tone. If we look at the four basic structures we are talking about—concrete,

formal, pluralistic, integral—there is nothing about those stages that says, this stage *inherently* must be agentic and this one must be communal. So here is my suggestion: *every stage can be experienced in either a relatively agentic or communal fashion*. And that means that green can exist in both hot and cool tones—there is both agentic green and communal green. In fact, it appears that whether a particular stage is agentic or communal depends on factors *in all four quadrants*. Let me give some quick examples:

“In the Upper-Left quadrant, a major contributing factor is whether you are a male or female. If you are a male, then you are *more likely* to experience most stages of growth with a relative emphasis on agency. When you go through the concrete stage (blue), you might be a John Wayne—a strong defender of traditional communal values, but carried out in a very strong agentic fashion! (Because SD incorrectly insists that blue is communal by nature, it is *forced* to say that John Wayne is ‘dipping back into red’ for his agentic tilt; but that is exactly what John Wayne’s screen character *is not*: his character is humble, self-facing, never takes credit, just does his duty, fights for God and country, never complains, never draws attention to himself: he has so little red it’s pathetic! What he is, is strong *agentic blue*, a fact SD can’t account for). Of course, if you are a man with a more communal personality, then you will experience blue in a more communal way. Likewise a woman with a more agentic personality will be more individualistic at this stage, and so on. There is no biological determinism here, it is simply that biological factors in the UR quadrant have a significant hand in determining how the stages will be experienced, and that means that, *on average*, males will experience stages more agentially and females more communally (probably testosterone and oxytocin, but that’s another topic). The point is that each stage can tilt toward agentic or communal, depending on various factors in the UR.

“Likewise, of course, with factors in the Lower-Left quadrant: one’s *cultural background* will have a very strong say in how individuals experience the stages of development. I was talking with a friend from Japan just yesterday, and he said that his countrymen just do not have any stage that is highly agentic; it would kill most males or

females to be highly individualistic. ‘We have a saying: the nail that stands out, gets hammered down.’ This is often thought to be why the Japanese receive so few Nobel prizes—which demand individual, creative initiative—but are so good at taking other inventions and perfecting them. Well, the point is simply that, in Japan, all of the stages tend to have a strongly communal tone to them. Put it this way: orange in Japan is as communal as blue in America; moreover, according to my friend, the social herd pressure at orange is just as strong as it is at blue—there is very little ‘alternating’ going on here because the LL quadrant is so powerful in Japan.

“Look now at some of the factors in the Lower-Right quadrant: the social system itself—and especially the techno-economic base—can exert a profound influence on whether a stage will be experienced agentic or communally. Foraging, herding, industrial, and informational bases select strongly for agency; horticultural, agrarian, and maritime, more for communal. Horticultural red is actually very communal, herding red is flamingly agentic.

“Well, perhaps you see my point. I do not believe that there is anything inherent in the cognitive basic structures of a stage that says this stage must in all ways be agentic or must be communal. The relative strength of agency and communion at every stage is a product of factors in all four quadrants—intentional, behavioral, social, and cultural.

“Now this implies the following: because of factors in all four quadrants, the pluralistic stage in this country has been largely experienced as a communalistic stage, and SD has described that stage fairly accurately as the green meme. HOWEVER, many people—I would say, based on deductions from Paul Ray’s research, about 40% of those who go through the pluralistic level—experience that pluralistic level in strongly individualistic terms. In other words, they don’t go through a communal green-pluralism but an agentic green-pluralism. Not cool green, but hot green; not self-sacrificing but self-assertive; not politically correct, but politically individualistic. Both agentic and communal green are still pluralistic (they both share the *same* basic level of consciousness, which is postformal pluralistic-relative), but agentic is individual-emphasizing and communal is group-emphasizing. These

agentic folks are exactly the second-tier people who read SD and say, ‘I don’t have a green bone in my body—I did not go thru a green stage!’ These are the folks that led Jenny to question, correctly, whether the green meme—as described by SD—is a real stage (and she’s right: no, it isn’t. *But the pluralistic stage is.* In other words, cool green—which is the ONLY green for SD—is *not* a universal stage, because there is also hot green. Thus, everybody goes through green, but it can be either cool or hot, depending on the four quadrants. The pluralistic green wave is universal, but neither cool green nor hot green is. So you can indeed get to second tier without ever going through cool green.)

“But then Jenny attempted to correct the half-wrong part of SD by introducing her own half-wrong solution: she collapsed formal and pluralistic—making them two alternatives at the same level—in order to get around SD’s previous mistake of making it a necessity for people to have a pluralistic communal stage (and she’s right, you do *not* have to go through a green communal stage—you do not have to go through cool green, because you can go through hot green), and thus she collapsed the four stages into three in an attempt to get around that very real problem. But she can get around the basic problem by keeping the four stages and seeing that people can experience each of them in an agentic or communal fashion. This fits with all the other research that sees these four stages as being very real; but it avoids the basic problem of claiming that the pluralistic stage must be communal/affiliative, when in fact many people—including Jenny and me—went through the pluralistic stage in an agentic fashion. That is, we did not go through cool green, we went through hot green. And it was *not* that we went from orange to yellow and ‘quickly dipped into green’ as defined by SD—no real stage conception can work like that (see Kegan’s *In Over Our Heads*). When you are developing the competence of a particular wave, you have to *really develop it*—there is no mere ‘dipping.’ (SD is forced to resort to the notion of ‘dipping’ because it mis-defines the deep structures of the pluralistic/green wave in the first place as being *necessarily* cool, and thus anybody who does *not* experience cool green is said to be merely dipping into it during a fast rush past it—but it just don’t work that way! Moreover, you cannot escape this

difficulty by backing off the claim that the vMememes are stages and asserting instead that they are adaptive intelligences that can be lit up in various admixtures by different life conditions, because if that is so, then they are *not* stages and that claim must be dropped: you can't have it both ways: you cannot say an organism can use its atoms and use its cells but not use its molecules. The fact is, the vMememes develop in stages that can *then* be used as adaptive intelligences, and as for the stages themselves, you cannot skip stages—you cannot 'dip' into green.)

“I would add that, in fact, *most* of the second-tier people I know went through the pluralistic stage in an agentic fashion (they went through hot green), for the simple reason that if you go through the pluralistic stage in a more typically communal fashion—cool green—then in this day and age you almost always get caught in the herd mentality of politically correct thinking, the mean green meme, and the epidemic of boomeritis, and therefore you never make it to yellow, because cool green, accounting for probably 60% of green, dominates the cultural and academic scene.)

“So when I continue to refer to these four stages as blue, orange, green, and yellow, I mean in the more general sense of the values, the morals, and the self-senses correlated with the four basic structures or basic levels of concrete, formal, pluralistic, and integral waves of consciousness.

“So it is absolutely not the complete truth when many second-tier people say: I did not go through green! What they mean is, they did not go through communal green; but they did go through agentic green, agentic pluralism. Of course they went through a pluralistic stage—*of course* they can take multiple perspectives, of course they are sensitive to multiple cultures and diversity issues, and of course they do not want to marginalize or oppress anybody. Jenny, for example—who is fond of saying 'I don't have a green bone in my body'—is actually one of the most culturally sensitive people I know—she went through agentic green, not communal green.

“I mentioned the chakra system. You all know the chakra system, yes? You’ve heard of it? It’s probably the most archetypal psychospiritual model ever devised. In the chakras, there are seven main levels of consciousness—the seven chakras—but what is most interesting is that at every chakra, there are also two energy currents: ida and pingala, or masculine and feminine, or solar and lunar, or agency and communion, or hot and cool. *Each level of consciousness is said to have access to both agency and communion*, and how that level is experienced depends on the individual in question.

“Now the view I am proposing is very similar to the chakra system, in that each level can be experienced along a continuum from almost purely agentic to almost purely communal, depending on factors in all four quadrants. No level is merely or intrinsically agentic or communal. So the next time you see a Caduceus—the staff with two swirling serpents representing agency and communion at each level—you can think of this model....

“Well, what I am saying is that the approach I am suggesting can accommodate the four stages of SD (blue, orange, green, yellow), IF it is understood that none of them are intrinsically agentic or communal, and therefore Jenny is quite correct when she claims that communal or cool green is NOT a necessary stage (it isn’t, because there is agentic or hot green—that is, agentic pluralistic). *But nobody gets to yellow/integral without going through pluralistic* (nobody gets to second tier without going through green in the most general sense of pluralistic relativism, whether hot or cool). This is why we say that is only through green that second tier emerges—only after pluralistic can you find integral.

“And boomeritis can strike either agentic green or communal green, hot green or cool green—which is why, either way, boomeritis is still the great roadblock to second-tier, integral consciousness.”